

New Food Choices 2009

Frequently Asked Questions

February 17, 2009

This document answers questions about foods being added, changed, and removed from the Washington State WIC Nutrition Program Approved Food List, as of October 1, 2009. Decisions about approved WIC foods were based on:

- 1) The requirements in the new federal WIC rule
- 2) Cost
- 3) Potential confusion at the grocery store
- 4) Availability
- 5) Client preference

Question: Why are you not approving organic milk?

Answer: The reason is cost. Most organic milk costs over two times more than non-organic milk. When organic milk was approved for Washington WIC eight years ago, it was only slightly more costly. This is no longer true and we cannot afford to approve organic milk.

We heard from over 900 people asking us to keep organic milk approved. Many made statements that organic milk is better - more nutritious and with fewer pesticides, hormones and antibiotics than non-organic milk.

We are aware there are studies that show the benefits of organic food as well as studies which either do not show a benefit, or actually show a negative effect. WIC's primary mission is nutrition education, not research or interpreting data, and so we rely on scientific experts at universities and other organizations to interpret all the studies and provide guidance for food selection. In particular we look to the National Academy of Sciences, Institute of Medicine and the American Academy of Pediatrics. They and other experts do not currently state organic food should be available through WIC programs.

- In 2005 the **National Academy of Sciences, Institute of Medicine** did a thorough study of the WIC foods. While they made many recommendations on what food should or should not be offered in WIC, they made no reference to the need for organic food.
[http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/menu/Published/WIC/FILES/Time4AChange\(mainrpt\).pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/menu/Published/WIC/FILES/Time4AChange(mainrpt).pdf).
- The **American Academy of Pediatrics** has not supported the need for organic food.
- The **American Medical Association** has not supported the need for organic food
- The **Mayo Clinic** states there is no benefit to children from organic food.
www.mayoclinic.com/health/organic-baby-food/AN01424#
- The **American Dietetic Association** states there is no benefit from organic food.
http://www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/home_4143_ENU_HTML.htm

- The **U.S. Department of Agriculture** states there is no conclusion about the need for or benefit from organic food. <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/faq/BuyOrganicFoodsIntro.shtml>
- The **National Dairy Council** states there is no benefit from organic milk. <http://www.nationaldairycouncil.org/NationalDairyCouncil/Nutrition/Products/Organic+Milk+FAQ+HTML.htm>

Without support from the experts we cannot justify the additional cost of organic milk. We understand this is disappointing for some WIC clients, and we encourage clients who prefer organic milk to stay on the WIC program for other program benefits and foods. For these clients we can take milk off of their WIC checks.

Question: Is there a type of non-organic milk that I can drink that would address my concerns?

Answer: Because pesticide residue and/or natural or synthetic hormones are some of the areas of concern expressed by organic food advocates, non-fat milk is a good choice. Any traces of pesticides and hormones would be found in the fat part of milk.

Question: Why can't I buy organic milk with my WIC check and just get less of it?

Answer: Federal WIC rules say the program must provide a certain amount of food, not a certain cash value. The required food and amounts are based on the nutritional needs of WIC clients. WIC must provide all the milk the federal rules require.

Question: Why can't I use my WIC check for organic milk and pay the difference?

Answer: Federal WIC rules say the program must provide a certain amount of food, not a certain cash value. If organic milk is allowed, WIC has to pay the full amount for it. To protect WIC clients, the rules do not allow them to have to pay anything for WIC foods.

Question: Why are some organic foods approved but not others?

Answer: The reason is cost. Organic foods that meet federal requirements, are widely available, and cost no more than 10% above the cost of non-organic food are approved. If they do not meet all these criteria, they are not approved.

Washington is one of very few states that have approved any organic foods other than fresh fruits and vegetables for WIC. Some state WIC programs have not approved any organic foods to have a simple, consistent message, "No organic". Washington evaluated the availability and cost of organic food in all categories. We found a number of organic products are cost-competitive, and approved these organic foods:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Safeway "O" Whole Wheat bread
- Brown rice
- Bulgur
- Oatmeal
- Legumes
- Tofu
- Soy beverage

Question: Why are you not approving pasteurized American cheese?

Answer: Very few Washington WIC clients select block pasteurized American cheese. This product is hard to find in stores because it is away from other approved cheeses (and near other not-approved cheese food products). Many stores no longer carry this product.

Question: Why are you not approving honey-nut peanut butter?

Answer: This product is easily and often confused with other peanut butters with honey, which do not meet federal rules and are not approved. Shopping for it has been frustrating for WIC clients and WIC stores, and there are many equally nutritious and more easily selected products.

Question: Why are you not approving Smart Balance Omega Natural peanut butter?

Answer: The reason is cost. This product is more than 10% higher in cost than other peanut butter.

Question: Why are you not approving Multi-Grain Cheerios?

Answer: The reason is cost. Multigrain Cheerios cost 35% more than regular Cheerios. Regular Cheerios are also a whole grain, and there is a wide variety of other approved whole grain cereals from which to choose.

Question: Why are you not approving Special K?

Answer: The reason is cost. Special K was one of the more expensive cereals on our current food list, at about \$5.43 per pound.

Question: Why are you not approving Earth's Best organic infant cereal?

Answer: The reason is cost. This cereal costs over 10% more than other infant cereals.

Question: Why are you not approving blended juices?

Answer: This product is easily confused with other blended juices and juice drinks, many of which do not meet federal rules. Shopping for it has been frustrating for WIC clients and WIC-approved stores, and there are many equally nutritious and more easily selected products.

Question: Why is there less infant formula at 6 months?

Answer: This is required by the new federal WIC rule. The Institute of Medicine studied WIC foods and decided providing less formula and adding baby foods is the right thing to do.

Question: Why is there so much baby food?

Answer: This is required by the new federal WIC rule. The Institute of Medicine studied WIC foods and decided providing baby foods is the right thing to do.

Question: Why are you not approving frozen and canned fruits and vegetables?

Answer: Among canned and frozen fruits and vegetables, many items that could be approved look very much like products that do not qualify as WIC foods. It would be quite difficult to choose only the ones allowed, and we want to minimize confusion and frustration for WIC clients and workers in WIC-approved stores. Federal WIC rules do not allow us to have only select foods in cans or frozen, so at this time just (all) fresh fruits and vegetables will be allowed.